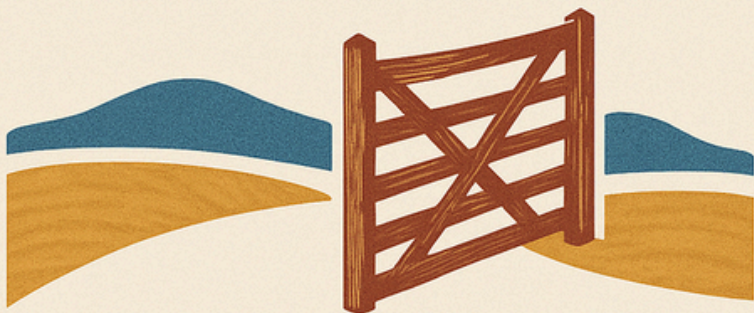


# OPENING THE GATE



November 20-21, 2025

Strand Union Building  
Montana State University

BOZEMAN ♦ MONTANA



**Montana  
Agritourism**

Dear friends,

Welcome to **OPENING THE GATE: Unlocking Agritourism Opportunities to Connect, Collaborate and Innovate** — the second annual Montana Agritourism Conference. Whether you're joining us for the first time or returning after last year's gathering, we're so glad you're here. This event was created with one simple aim: to bring together the people shaping agritourism in Montana — farmers, ranchers, tourism partners, educators, and community leaders — and give you space to connect, learn, and imagine what's next.

This year's conference builds on the momentum we've been growing together. With engaging speakers, hands-on tours, and breakout sessions across multiple learning tracks, we've designed this event to be practical, inspiring, and grounded in the real-world opportunities and challenges you face. Whether you're just getting started or ready to take things to the next level, we hope there's something here for you.

We know agritourism isn't one-size-fits-all. It looks different in every corner of the state — and that's part of what makes it so powerful. Our hope is that you leave this conference with fresh ideas, new connections, and a sense that you're part of something bigger. The work you're doing matters — and we're honored to support it.

Thank you for being here. Let's open the gate together.

*The Team at Montana Agritourism Association*

## Conference Logistics

### Where to Stay

We've reserved a block of rooms for **Thursday, November 20** at the **C'Mon Inn Bozeman**. It's just a short drive from the MSU Campus, where the main conference will be held on Friday.


- Address: 6139 E Valley Center Rd, Bozeman, MT 59718
- Phone: (406) 587-3555
- You'll need to **call** and ask for the "Montana Agritourism Conference" group rate (\$110 plus tax & fees). Online booking at this rate is not available.
- Group rates are available through **October 15**, but rooms may fill quickly — we encourage you to book early.


### Parking on Campus

Conference registration includes free parking in Bobcat Lots 20 and 25 on the MSU campus — just a short walk from the Strand Union Building. You'll receive the code by email the week before the event.

To use your free parking code, you'll need to download the Passport Parking app in advance.

• [!\[\]\(e474458956c9a37fbf9586ddb60a7fa1\_img.jpg\) Download the app here](#)

 **Note: Parking in the Visitor Parking Garage is not included with your registration.** Garage parking costs \$12 per day, payable via the same Passport Parking app or at a kiosk.

•  Find the campus map [here](#)

## Finding the Strand Union Building on the MSU Campus

All main conference sessions will be held at the Strand Union Building (SUB) on the campus of Montana State University. When you arrive, head to the Ballroom Lobby on the 2nd floor — that's where you'll find our registration desk, coffee station, and friendly faces ready to welcome you.

👉 Link to [Campus map](#)

## Meals, Coffee & Dietary Needs

Your conference registration includes:

- Thursday evening social at the C'Mon Inn with “Made in Montana” appetizers and drinks
- Coffee, tea, pastries on Friday morning
- Full lunch on Friday

We've done our best to accommodate any dietary needs submitted at registration. If you have a specific question or concern, please check in with the registration desk when you arrive.

## Accessibility & Accommodations

The Strand Union Building is wheelchair accessible, with elevators and accessible restrooms on each level. If you have specific accessibility needs or questions, please contact the SUB staff ahead of time at [AskUs@montana.edu](mailto:AskUs@montana.edu), and they'll be happy to help.

These organizations help us  
connect, collaborate, and educate.  
Thank you for your support!



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF  
**COMMERCE**



Conference schedule is subject to change

## Thursday, November 20

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- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 1:00pm - 4:00pm | <b>Farm Tours</b> around Bozeman <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• more details to add here</li><li>• instructions, farms list</li><li>• more</li></ul>   |
| 4:00pm - onward | C'Mon Inn Hotel check-in  |
| 5:00pm - 8:00pm | <b>Social Evening</b> , Conference Rooms at C'Mon Inn, Bozeman <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unwind with fellow attendees at our Thursday evening social, featuring Made in Montana food and drinks. It's a relaxed chance to connect, share stories, and enjoy local flavors together.</li></ul> |

## Friday, November 21

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|-------------------|---|
| 7:00am - 12:00pm  | <b>Conference Registration open</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoy coffee and pastries while visiting with the exhibitors and fellow attendees</li></ul> |
| 7:45am - 9:05am   | <b>Opening Remarks and Keynote Presentation</b>   |
| 9:05am - 9:15am   | Coffee break and room change  |
| 9:15am - 10:05am  | <b>Breakout sessions Round 1</b>  |
| 10:05am - 10:15am | Coffee break and room change  |
| 10:15am - 11:05am | <b>Breakout sessions Round 2</b>  |
| 11:05am - 11:15am | Coffee break and room change  |
| 11:15am - 12:05pm | <b>Marketing Panel</b> (general session)  |
| 12:05pm - 1:05pm  | <b>Lunch &amp; Resource Roundtable</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After lunch and roundtable, be sure to stop by our exhibitor's tables</li></ul>          |
| 1:15pm - 2:05pm   | <b>Breakout sessions Round 3</b>  |
| 2:05pm - 2:15pm   | Coffee break and room change  |
| 2:15pm - 2:45pm   | <b>Research plenary</b>   |
| 2:45pm - 3:00pm   | Closing remarks & Door Prizes   |
| 3:00pm - 4:00pm   | Additional networking and exhibitor time  |



# Friday, November 21

To help you navigate the day, we've grouped our breakout sessions into three themed **learning tracks**. Each track offers a guided pathway based on where you are in your agritourism journey, but feel free to mix and match!

- 🌱 **Planting the Seed** - Perfect for those just getting started or firming up the basics.
- 🌻 **Out in the Field** - Designed for operators already welcoming visitors and ready to elevate the experience.
- 🌿 **The Long View** - Geared toward those thinking long-term: sustainability, growth, and legacy planning.

Each breakout round includes one session from each track, so you can choose what's most relevant to you — no need to stick to a single track all day. This structure also helps our speakers tailor their content to the folks in the room.

## Session Highlights

### Round 1

- 🌱: **Agritourism 101** – What you need to know before opening the gate
- 🌻: **From field trips to farm camps** – Welcoming groups with purpose
- 🌿: **Passing the torch** – Succession planning on the farm or ranch

### Round 2

- 🌱: **Show me the map** – The Why, What, and How in Navigating Business Considerations for an Agritourism Start Up
- 🌻: **Events that work** – Hosting outdoor gatherings with heart
- 🌿: **Pedal to profit** – Farm-to-farm cycling events that power local food economies

### Round 3

- 🌱: **Better safe than sorry** – Insurance & risk basics
- 🌻: **Making it memorable** – Hospitality and the guest experience
- 🌿: **In their boots** – Stories and lessons from agritourism operators

# Friday, November 21

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➤ 7:00am - 12:00pm **Conference Registration**, SUB foyer

➤ 7:45am - 9:05am **Keynote Presentation**

## *Matt Skoglund, North Bridger Bison*



Matt is the founder and owner of North Bridger Bison, a bison ranch rooted in Regenerative Agriculture principles located in Montana's Shields Valley. The Skoglund's sell Montana-raised, 100% grassfed, field-harvested bison meat direct-to-consumer in the greater Bozeman area and all over the country. They have also developed a strong agritourism business on their ranch.

Matt has lived in Montana since 2008. Prior to starting North Bridger Bison in 2018, Matt was the Director of the Northern Rockies Office for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), where he worked on various conservation issues in Montana and the Northern Rockies for ten years.



A former college hockey player, Matt is a graduate of Middlebury College and the University of Illinois College of Law. He is passionate about food and ranching, and he loves to hunt, garden, cook, and forage for morel mushrooms in the spring. Matt and his wife, Sarah, have two young children, Otto and Greta.

*"I'm passionate about ranching in Montana, connecting people to where their food comes from, and opening their eyes to all of the amazing benefits that ranching provides the greater public."*



# Friday, November 21

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 9:15am - 10:05am **Concurrent Breakout Sessions**

## **Agritourism 101: What you need to know before Opening the Gate**

For anyone new to agritourism, this session introduces the terms, trends, and truths of the field. Erin and Jon Turner of Turner Farms 406 in Missoula will share lessons from nearly two decades of welcoming visitors, growing food, and building community on their organically managed farm between the Bitterroot and Clark Fork rivers.

Their story — from a bunk-bed farm stand to a thriving business — offers a lively, practical foundation for opening your gates.

## **From Field Trips to Farm Camps: Welcoming Groups with Purpose**

Opening your gates to school groups, clubs, and camps can be rewarding, and daunting. This session offers practical tips for hosting with confidence.

Laura Garber of Homestead Organics Farm in the Bitterroot Valley grew small beginnings into Cultivating Connections Montana, a nonprofit offering youth internships, school visits, and on-farm dinners. Mike Jetty, Indian Education Specialist with the Montana Office of Public Instruction, is a Spirit Lake Dakota Nation and Turtle Mountain Chippewa descendant with three decades of experience in education.

Together, they'll share how to make farm visits safe, meaningful, and memorable.

## **Passing the Torch: Succession Planning on the Farm or Ranch**

Succession planning isn't just about legal documents — it's about family, legacy, and the future of your land. This session blends practical tools with real-life perspective for approaching the process with clarity and confidence.

Dr. Marsha Goetting, Extension Family Economics Specialist at Montana State University, has delivered hundreds of legacy planning programs and brings deep expertise in estate and financial planning. Tana Canen of Mahlstedt Ranch in Glendive balances agritourism, ranching, and family life while navigating her own succession journey.

Their combined perspectives highlight both the practical and emotional sides of “passing the torch.”

# Friday, November 21

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➡ 10:15am - 11:05am **Concurrent Breakout Sessions**

## **Show Me the Map: The Why, What, and How in Navigating Business Considerations for an Agritourism Start-Up**

Discover the key questions to ask when creating a solid foundation for your agritourism business. This session features experts from Montana's Food and Agriculture Development Centers (FADCs), who bring experience in economic development, farm and food systems, and business planning.

Eric Seidensticker leads the statewide network from Montana Business Assistance Connection, focusing on rural business development and agriculture. Grace Nichols in Ravalli County supports producers with planning, grants, and farm-to-school programs. Sam Blomquist at Prospera in Bozeman blends training in sustainable food systems and nutrition with community connections. Ben Thiem of Montana West Economic Development adds two decades of nonprofit leadership and engagement.

Together, this panel offers practical tools and lessons to help you build a business plan that is both realistic and rooted in Montana's opportunities.

## **Events That Work: Planning Outdoor Gatherings with Heart (and Backup Plans)**

From weddings to workshops, outdoor events can bring visitors to your farm in powerful ways. In this session, presenters will share stories, strategies, and lessons learned from hosting gatherings that are joyful, meaningful, and logistically sound. You'll walk away with tips for planning, managing risk, and ensuring guests leave with lasting memories. **(Speaker details forthcoming.)**

## **Pedal to Profit: Organizing Farm-to-Farm Cycling Events That Power Local Food Economies**

Cycling tours are emerging as a unique way to connect visitors to farms, food, and communities. This session highlights how Montana operators are creating farm-to-farm cycling events that support producers, draw visitors, and strengthen local economies. Learn what it takes to organize a successful ride, from logistics to partnerships, and hear examples from communities across the state. **(Speaker details forthcoming.)**

# Friday, November 21

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## ➤ 11:15am - 12:05am Marketing Panel (General session)

### **Marketing Agritourism in Montana: Stories from the Field**

Marketing isn't optional — it's how people find you, trust you, and remember you. But in agritourism, it's also personal: you're not just promoting an event, you're inviting people into your place and your story.

This plenary brings together a diverse panel of voices to share strategies, lessons, and tools for reaching the right audiences. **Erin Austin**, Director of Community Partners and Sales at Abundant Montana, draws on years of experience in farming, education, and statewide food systems work. **Jackson Stewart**, storyteller and retreat host at B Bar Ranch, connects hospitality and agriculture through immersive guest experiences rooted in the rhythms of ranch life. And **Seth and Jennie Becker**, of Stick Leg Ranch in Valier, bring firsthand perspective on building a direct-to-consumer beef business and welcoming visitors to their family ranch.

Together, they'll explore marketing that is authentic, doable, and true to the people behind the gate. Expect real-world stories, practical takeaways, and encouragement for creating connections that last.

## ➤ 12:05pm - 1:05pm Lunch and Resource Roundtable

### **Roundtable Resource Session**

Lunch is more than a meal at this year's conference, it's a chance to connect. After grabbing your plate, choose a table by topic and join a guided conversation with resource experts.


Confirmed discussions include:

- SCBG grants with Caitlin Hortert, Montana Department of Agriculture
- BAM & GTA Grants with Bailey Kaskie, Montana Department of Agriculture
- Agritourism grants with Susan Joy, Montana Department of Commerce

This is your chance to ask questions, share experiences, and leave with practical ideas tailored to your work.

# Friday, November 21

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 1:15pm - 2:05pm **Concurrent Breakout Sessions**

## **Better Safe Than Sorry: Insurance & Risk Basics for Agritourism**

Insurance and liability aren't optional for agritourism — but they don't have to be overwhelming. This session walks you through the key risks, essential coverage, and smart practices that protect both your guests and your business.

**Eric Goldstein**, founder of *G5 Insurance*, has spent decades working with agricultural and food industry operations. He brings a practical, plain-language approach that takes the mystery out of insurance and focuses on what really matters. His guidance helps operators move past fear and feel confident about opening their gates.

## **Making It Memorable: Hospitality and the Guest Experience**

What makes a great visitor experience? It's not just the activities you offer, but how welcome people feel and how much care is in the details.

**Spencer and Casey Clark** of *Elkhorn Ranch* share insights from years of guest ranching, guiding, and hosting. They highlight how mentoring staff and blending tradition with modern expectations create memorable stays. Their approach shows that meaningful connections turn first-time visitors into loyal supporters — and ensure guests leave saying, “we can't wait to come back.”

## **In Their Boots: The Good, The Hard, and The Worthwhile**

Running an agritourism business comes with highs, lows, and everything in between. This candid panel brings together Montana operators Micah Bowden of Greycliff Mill, Mike Sullivan of Longview Lavender Farm, and Erin Helm of Primrose Station to share what really happens when you open your gates to the public.

Expect honesty, humor, and hard-earned lessons as they reflect on the moments that shine, the challenges that test, and the reasons they keep showing up for the work they love.

# Friday, November 21

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➤ 2:15pm - 2:45pm **Research Plenary**

## **Insights from the Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research**

What do we know about agritourism in Montana? What are visitors looking for — and how can operators respond?

In this general session, researchers from the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) share findings from their applied studies on outdoor recreation, tourism, and visitor experiences. **Dr. Elena Bigart**, a social science specialist with two decades of international and Montana-based research, and **Glenna Hartman**, who focuses on qualitative data and park projects, bring fresh insights and grounded perspective.

Their work offers a data-driven look at agritourism today — and the opportunities that lie ahead.

➤ 2:45pm - 3:00pm **Closing remarks**

➤ 3:00pm - 4:00pm **Extra networking time**

# Coming Next Summer

## Montana Agritourism Mini-Conference


While the snow still falls and the days are short, we're already dreaming ahead to summer.


Join us for a special mid-year gathering designed to keep ideas fresh and connections strong.

This mini-conference will bring together farmers, ranchers, and partners for a focused day of learning, sharing, and inspiration.

Think of it as a chance to recharge, swap stories, and pick up practical tools — right in the heart of Montana's growing season.

 Date announced this spring

 Location in planning

 Watch for registration details soon





## About the Montana Agritourism Association (MAA)

Agritourism is growing across Montana — and so is the community behind it. Whether you host farm stays, lead school tours, sell direct to visitors, or support producers in another way, you're part of something that connects people to land, food, and real experiences.

The Montana Agritourism Association (MAA) was created to bring people together, share knowledge, and make things easier for everyone working in this space. We're a nonprofit, member-based group made up of farmers, ranchers, tourism folks, educators, students, and partners from across the state.

### What you'll get as a member:

- Access to member-only resources and online events
- Discounts on the annual conference and MAA publications
- A listing on our website (for Active members)
- Print and digital tools to help tell your story
- A growing network of peers who are figuring it out, just like you

We offer three membership types — **Active**, **Associate**, and **Student** — so whether you're just starting out or have been doing this for years, you're welcome here.

### Ready to join?

Visit [montanaagritourism.com/membership](https://montanaagritourism.com/membership) to sign up online, or stop by the Membership Table during the conference. We'd love to say hello, answer questions, and get you connected. Let's keep building this — together.



# Montana Agritourism